

Why Is It So Hard To Do The Right Thing?

By George Porter

Installation in this country is about to reach “critical mass.” This is an atomic energy term that means the reactor is in danger of a meltdown unless correct action is taken immediately. The folks over in the conventional homebuilding business must be ecstatic. Here we have been gobbling up more of their portion of new housing every year, with several states accounting for over 50% of all new homes, and they had no idea how to turn this thing around. Conventional and modular home builders have been racking their brains about what to do here and they have not found a way to get back their customers. Truth is, they never will as long as the HUD Code industry can provide affordable housing in a timely manner with a high degree of consumer satisfaction. Their only hope would be for us to shoot ourselves in the foot because they have very little control over what we can do.

Right now, I feel we have taken dead aim on both feet and have begun to put pressure on the trigger. We have committees all over the place trying to figure out if the ground freezes under our homes in the winter up north and if it really does, will it affect our homes? The answer to this question has been around ever since the ice age, of course it does, unless you take steps to prevent the ice from forming under the supports of the home. Most homes require some support in several places around the perimeter and if you don’t either dig down lower than the frost goes or insulate the foundation under the ground it will heave. Insulated foundations have been used all over the world for 50 years; I have carried all the engineering technology in a folder in my briefcase for the last 7 years. I have showed it to everyone but no one is all that interested. They want to find a way that will not change the old ways of doing things and yet prevent the home from flexing and cracking the drywall. Good luck!

I was recently in a state that does not require tiedowns on the homes if they are located in a rental community. As I was driving down the interstate I could see some very dark clouds up ahead of me. As I got closer the clouds got darker and the radio started announcing severe storm warnings with possible tornados. I started to encounter heavy rain, high wind and hail. I drove to the nearest overpass and parked under it with about 30 other cars. The rain increased until you could not see 20 feet and then the wind really started to scream. I am absolutely sure the wind speed was over 80 mph. and the rain was totally horizontal. The car started to shake and I thought, this is it! I am about to get hit by a tornado and I can’t think of anything to do except sit here and let it happen.

I was very concerned that all 30 cars were going to get swept into a big pile with me at the bottom or the concrete bridge was going to get knocked down on top of all of us or both. Suddenly the wind died down and the rain stopped and it was over. I later heard on the news that a tornado had overturned several trucks on the same road.

As I started to get back to normal and continue the trip, I had to think about the people who live

in manufactured housing in this state. They have an installation law with enforcement that they take very seriously, but the requirement for anchoring in rental communities has been specifically omitted. You only have to anchor the home if you own the land! What were they thinking of when they made this up!

There are several states that have similar anchoring regulations and many more that do not require frost-protected foundations, even though the factory set-up manuals say that you need both. As the states begin to enact set-up regulations they sometimes try to preserve the old way of doing things; and this, I fear, will be our undoing.

In some cases Government is prevented from doing what needs to be done and they become frustrated and look for other ways to regulate the industry. How about this idea by the State of Pennsylvania? The HUD Seal on every home is the federal guarantee that the home will perform to its assigned roof load, its proper wind load, and its appropriate thermal efficiency.

Pennsylvania says how can it do that if it has not been set-up yet. It is just sitting on some wheels and it can't hold the roof load like that. Without anchors it can't take the wind loads involved. A multi-section home has nothing but a plastic sheet on one wall so how can that be energy efficient? How can the government issue a HUD seal when what the seal guarantees has not done yet? The home can't possibly do all these things until it is properly installed, and they feel the HUD Seal should not go on until then!! Do you know what this means? It means that every home installation will have to be inspected by a federally approved and authorized inspector on site before it gets a HUD Seal on it! This is real, it has national supporters, and, like it or not, it makes enough sense to receive serious attention and possibly be enacted. It is happening because this industry can't seem to enact scientifically accurate and politically sound installation laws that can provide the HUD Code with the backup it needs to keep its promise to the home buyer. In defense of the industry in Pa. they have tried very hard for at least the last 5 years to get an installation law passed. They have spent enormous amounts of money and time lobbying but the politicians just don't want to do it for some reason. Everyone in the industry and especially the industry regulators want it passed, so who is blocking the legislation? Obviously someone who knows it will be good for the manufactured housing industry and bad for them, wonder who that could be?

We are currently doing great, but if we persist in our present direction concerning installation we will surely snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. We can't afford to think it will all go away. Maybe if we can just hold it off for a few more years things will change? My guess is that they surely will and not for the better.

If your State has good laws that deal with reality and have a proper degree of regulation then none of this may affect you. The other States with bad or no laws are about to go for a ride in a blender, and they may not be able to regain control. I hope they don't take the rest of us with them. The conventional building industry will not come to our rescue, they will just sit back and watch their market share grow. They probably won't even thank us for it.

